

Trishna home to hero's welcome

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The 16-month-long of the voyage around the world of yacht 'Trishna' came to an end on Saturday, when it coasted into Bombay to a tumultuous welcome, and etched a unique place for itself in the annals of Indian yachting history.

The pennant-decked yacht arrived at the Gateway of India at precisely 4.00 pm against the backdrop of multi coloured flares fired from naval ships in the harbour and tiny sloops and yachts cruising around the harbour. Spontaneous applause rent the air as thousands of spectators gave vent to their joyous feelings and welcomed the sailing heroes.

The chief of Army staff, General K. Sunderji welcomed the crew, who were led by their 'skipper' Lt Col K. S. Rao, when they landed at the stone berth of the gateway. Also on hand were senior Army, Navy and government officials, alongwith the family members of the crew.

The crew which completed the odyssey months ahead of schedule, were given a warm reception under the portals of the gateway. Speaking

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Fanfare as Trishna docks

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on the occasion, General Sunderji announced that a hero's welcome awaited the team at Delhi, where they will be felicitated among others by the President, the Vice-President and the Prime Minister.

The General also praised the gallant crew, all of whom belong to the Corps of engineers and said that most new things in the Army were begun by the sappers. He also made special reference to the courage and determination of Major A. K. Singh, a handicapped member of the crew.

General Sunderji commended the role played by the former minister of state for defence production, Mr. K. P. Singh Deo, in getting the expedition "off the ground".

The General also released a special stamp on the occasion brought out by the post and telegraph department. The Rs 6.50 stamp depicts the yacht in the foreground with a world map showing the route taken by the yacht.

The team presented the chief of staff with a brass etching of the yacht, to commemorate the historic occasion.

The general announced that another expedition would be organised in 1988, which would go around

the treacherous Cape Horn.

Earlier, the engineer-in-chief of the corps of engineers, Lt. Gen. P. S. Roy, said that in its voyage, the yacht had touched 31 ports and was manned by a permanent team of four, the skipper, Lt. Col. K. S. Rao, Major A. K. Singh, Captain S. Shekher and Captain C. Bharati. These four 'sailors' became the first Indians to circumnavigate the globe in a yacht, covering a distance of 33,000 nautical miles.

Lt. Col. K. S. Rao became the first Indian soldier to be awarded a 'rank' at sea, when he was promoted from Major to Lt. Col.

The other six members of the team included Col. T. P. S. Chaudhary, the team manager, Major A. Bhattacharya, Major S. N. Mathur, Major A. P. Singh, Captain R. Bassi and the youngest member of the team, Lt. N. Ahuja. All of them did different sailing time on the yacht's voyage around the world.

The 'skipper' who was one of the four Indians to circumnavigate the world said that the Trishna experience was a 'dream come true when we took off and it was a dream realised now'. He was also overjoyed to meet his 11-month daughter who was born when the yacht glided into

Barbados on February 7, 1986. His daughter was promptly named 'Trishna' by his wife Vani. Both mother and daughter were at the gateway to receive their hero. Young Trishna was seen waving a placard saying 'welcome home daddy'.

Major A. K. Singh too was received by his wife and two daughters, who were also carrying a placard welcoming 'daddy and Trishna'. The voyage experience was like 'living life through again' for Major Singh, who had lost his leg in a hang-gliding accident in 1983 had volunteered for the expedition nonetheless, and now plans to unwind and write a book about his experiences.

Col. T. P. S. Chaudhary, the team manager said that occasionally there were frayed tempers and exchange of hot words between crew members but this was to be expected on such a long voyage and in a confined space. However, things never got out of hand and these arguments 'were similar to ones between brothers', said the baby of the crew, Lt N. Ahuja.

Col. Chaudhary said that the yacht had taken a lot of battering and had its sail torn and engine damaged. The boat was taken out for repairs twice.

Lt Col Rao retorted the observation that the expedition was a cake walk, with the best of equipment made available to the crew. There are far superior and sophisticated boats than the Trishna, he said. With reference to the solo circumnavigation of Bob Chisterser, he said that the equipment used by the former was very sophisticated and the yacht too was much larger. Asked if he would like to do a 'solo', he said he could, but dismissed the possibility by saying that it would be a very expensive venture which probably no one would sponsor.

The Rs 6 lakh Finnish-made yacht was refitted in Bombay with all basic cruising equipment including a depth sounder, wind instruments, radios, satellite navigation systems and a diesel engine for emergencies.

Earlier on Saturday, the yacht began the last leg of its voyage when it left Mandova in the afternoon after a night's halt.